

## **Was the Donor of the First Heart Transplant Actually Brain Dead? A Contribution to the History of Brain Death Concept**

More than fifty years ago, the first heart transplant performed by Christiaan Barnard in Cape Town, South Africa resulted in the re-evaluation of death and introduction of brain death concept into clinical practice. According to the common knowledge of medical history, the donor of the first heart transplant was a 25-year-old brain-dead victim of a car accident. In order to test whether the donor was actually brain dead, a careful examination of the original scientific publications and a search for additional data related to the first heart transplant was performed. The most important results of the study are as follows: a) brainstem reflexes of the donor have not been referred, though their importance had been known by Barnard; b) the donor was doubtlessly breathing spontaneously from admission until disconnection from the ventilator; c) declaration of donor's brain damage being 'lethal' could be biased; d) neither brainstem herniation nor serious brain injury indicating brain death has been described in the autopsy report; e) the donor's heart was paralysed with potassium; f) using the vital organ of a heart-beating, non-brain dead patient for transplantation is compatible with Christiaan Barnard's character and views supporting active euthanasia; g) the original medical documents are not available, despite the cult of Barnard's first heart transplant in Cape Town. Taken together, these data suggest that the donor of the world's first heart transplant was not brain dead and if so, may have died of involuntary active euthanasia.

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